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The Graceling Realm Series

Maggie Mason Smith

Clemson University, mason5@clemson.edu

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Recommended Citation

Mason Smith, Maggie, "The Graceling Realm Series" (2014). *Publications*. 77.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/lib_pubs/77

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“They say Leck is utterly charming, even his eyepatch is charming. They say he grieved for the king and queen terribly and couldn’t possibly have had anything to do with their deaths.” – Graceling, page 199

Cashore, Kristin. *Graceling*. New York: Harcourt, 2008. PZ7.C26823Gr 2008.

Throughout the land of the seven kingdoms there live those who are Graced. A Grace is a specific skill; those who are Graced have a skill far surpassing the ability of a regular person. Some Graces are useful such as a cooking Grace or a healing Grace, and some graces are useless such as a Grace for climbing trees or a Grace for talking backward, but no two Graces are exactly the same. Katsa’s Grace is killing. Naturally, because of this Katsa is feared, and her uncle, King Randa of the Middluns, frequently uses this to his advantage. When Katsa can no longer stomach her uncle’s orders she flees the Middluns with Po, a Prince from Lienid who is traveling to the court of King Leck, in Monsea. Katsa is quickly caught up in a rescue mission, but as she begins to better understand both herself and her Grace, it becomes clear that her journey may ultimately be her own salvation.

Cashore, Kristin. *Fire: A Graceling Realm Book*. New York: Dial Books, 2009. PZ7.C26823Fi 2009.

The unknown lands to the east of Monsea contain peculiarities of their own: monsters, and not Gracelings, live in the Dells. Dellian monsters are variations of normal animals, distinguishable by their vibrantly colorful skin, fur, scales, feathers, or shells, as well as their ability to creep into the unguarded minds of others and thereby intensify a feeling, alter a thought, or compel an action. Fire is a monster – she is the last human monster in the land – and as a result of her beauty and power, she is constantly in danger. But when Fire joins the court of King Nash, she encounters an altogether new kind of danger: a devious and brutal young man named Leck. Fire must find a way to rescue herself, both physically and mentally, if she wishes to have any kind of future – especially a future with Prince Brigan. And as she is slowly pushed toward the center of the upcoming Dellian war, Fire must save herself quickly.

Cashore, Kristin. *Bitterblue: A Graceling Realm Book*. New York: Dial Books, 2012. PZ7.C26823Bit 2012.

At roughly ten years old Bitterblue became the Queen of Monsea and now, nearly nine years after the death of her father, her kingdom is still tormented by the memories of dead King

Leck. Bitterblue relies on her team of advisors and their policy of forward-thinking to help her guide Monsea toward progress and toward healing, but despite regular reports of improvement throughout the land, Bitterblue has begun to suspect her advisors of dishonesty. Frustrated and desperate to learn more about her kingdom, Bitterblue begins sneaking out of the castle at night. With the help of a writer named Teddy and a thief named Saf, Bitterblue learns that King Leck's reign was far worse than she imagined, and that someone in Monsea is willing to kill to keep those memories from coming to light. Bitterblue must mend the kingdom; perhaps along the way, she will be able to mend herself.

Kristin Cashore's *Graceling Realm* trilogy is an exceptional example of young adult fantasy. At the heart of each book is a female character struggling with her own identity; but, the unique personal traits of each heroine, the intricate and interrelated plot of each book, and the dynamic supporting characters which overlap throughout the series prove that Cashore has created a complex world without even a hint of formulaic writing. The most intriguing part of the series however, is that the central figure of each work is not truly a main character in any of them and though *Fire* is technically a prequel to *Graceling*, with *Bitterblue* rounding out the trilogy, the books need not be read in a particular order, but rather, when taken as a whole, form a coherent impression of Leck's life and his influence on the lives of those around him. *Graceling*, *Fire*, and *Bitterblue* are three distinct tales, which methodically entwine to flesh out the narrative of one man, to examine the lasting impact of his violence and manipulation, and to show that with a little help from friends, even the most enduring difficulty can be conquered.